



TEXAS HUMAN TRAFFICKING PREVENTION LAWS UPDATE

by Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott

HUMAN TRAFFICKING IS A HORRIFIC CRIME that subjects its victims to modern day slavery – forced labor – for little or no pay. According to the U.S. State Department, as many as 27 million men, women and children worldwide remain trapped as slaves by traffickers who strip away their dignity and basic human rights by preying on their vulnerabilities and exploiting them for involuntary labor and compulsory prostitution services.

This horrendous crime touches victims across the globe – and right here in Texas.

Eliminating human trafficking is a lofty goal, but it is well worth the effort because the cause is just – saving those who suffer the anguish, pain and shame of servitude. In 2003, the State of Texas took major steps to fight human trafficking by passing one of the first state-level anti-trafficking laws in the U.S. At the same time, regional task forces and other collaborative efforts were established across the state to identify human trafficking victims, create service response systems, and

bring traffickers to justice.

In 2009, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill 4009 by Sen. Leticia Van de Putte and Rep. Randy Weber, creating the Texas Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force. The Task Force's inaugural report to the 82nd Texas Legislature highlighted the Task Force's collaborative approach to address human trafficking on a statewide and regional level. Of the 35 legislative recommendations identified in the 2011 Task Force Report, the Texas Legislature enacted 32. The anti-trafficking legislation, which was sponsored by Sen. Van de Putte and Rep. Senfronia Thompson, provided an improved legal framework for combating human trafficking by:

- Defining sex and labor trafficking
- Increasing penalties upon conviction
- Creating automatic life sentence for subsequent convictions
- Affording more protection for child trafficking victims
- Including certain convictions in the sex offender registry

- Opening the use of protective orders for victims
- Fostering closer cooperation between investigating agencies

Unfortunately, while Texas has made significant progress, traffickers continue to adapt their criminal enterprises to entrap more victims and evade law enforcement. To eradicate human trafficking within our borders, Texas must meet these challenges head-on and with renewed commitment – providing new building blocks for law enforcement, prosecutors and service providers.

Recognizing that the most successful efforts will be those that utilize collaborative endeavors and pooled resources, the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force published its report for the 83rd Texas Legislature – outlining additional steps the State must take to prevent human trafficking.

Once again, Sen. Van de Putte and Rep. Thompson made human trafficking prevention a major focus of their lawmaking efforts. During the 83rd legislative session, these two seasoned, tireless legislators authored

and guided several human trafficking prevention bills through the lawmaking process. The new laws will toughen penalties against offenders who employ, authorize or compel a child to work in a sexually oriented business; improve victim identification, shelter and assistance; develop additional preventative strategies; and expand the duties of the Human Trafficking Prevention Task Force.

Improving and strengthening the State's human trafficking prevention laws will give Texas law enforcement agencies more training, tools and power to recognize and battle this problem. In light of human trafficking's complexity as a criminal enterprise, we all need to work together to find solutions that help victims and punish their oppressors.

For a copy of the publication, "The Texas Response to Human Trafficking," please visit our agency website at www.texasattorneygeneral.gov. Peace officers may direct additional inquiries to Captain Greg Lucas of the Criminal Investigations Division at (512) 936-1335.

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